

# **USAID ENVIRONMENT CENTER REPORT:**



**PROVIDING KEY INPUT TO MISSION  
STRATEGIES AND DEVELOPMENT OF A  
GUIDE FOR STRATEGY REVIEW**

## BACKGROUND

As stated in the [Global Environment Center's Strategic Plan](#), the Center's mandate is to "provide technical and programmatic leadership and support to the U.S. Agency for International Development, its country programs, and its domestic and international development partners in addressing global environment and sustainable development problems." Perhaps most importantly, "the [Center's] primary function is to support the environmentally-related efforts of USAID's country programs" via, "technical assistance, information, and training in the conceptualization, design, programming, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Agency's environmental activities."

As part of its overall support to Missions, the Center provides technical assistance for strategy development, and is responsible, along with the rest of the Bureau for Global Programs (as outlined in [ADS 201.3.4.15](#)), for reviewing and approving strategic plans. However, other priorities and time constraints often make it difficult for the Center, led by the Regional Coordinators, to undertake a thorough review of Mission strategies and prepare input for the Washington review process. Equally significant, the Center seldom is significantly involved in the early stages of Mission strategy development by, e.g., assessing key environmental issues, making Mission staff aware of any regional issues or programs, and offering technical assistance.

## OVERVIEW

A framework for the Center's participation in the strategy review process, articulated as a checklist or simple guide for key input to mission strategy development and adequate Washington review, was proposed to facilitate involvement. The Center, led by [Russel Backus](#), Regional Coordinator for Africa, Asia Near East, and Europe and Eurasia, sought to develop the checklist and test it in cooperation with the [Environment Information Clearinghouse](#) (EIC), a technical and administrative services activity for the Center implemented by PADCO, Inc. In order to test the utility of the checklist, the Center provided input to missions in various stages of the strategic planning and review cycle in FY 2001. In sum, the process involved two distinct phases: 1) development of a guide, and 2) testing the utility of the guide on three mission strategy processes.

## **PHASE 1: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHECKLIST/GUIDE**

The first phase of the process involved developing a global-level guide that would serve the interests of both the Center and USAID Missions. This document was to serve as the focus of an analytical process through which the Center could provide key support and guidance to Missions on environmental requirements and issues, while also helping to guide Washington review of strategic plans.

## **PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT**

A core team consisting of [Russel Backus](#) and the EIC was responsible for developing the guide, and for making it useful to the Center and USAID Missions. As originally conceptualized, the guide was to encompass, official ADS strategic planning and review guidance, and the context for using applicable ADS references; and relevant summary data and website links (Agency and non-Agency) for environment related reference information.

## **RESULTS**

After conducting the necessary research, the team developed *The Environment Center Guide to Requirements for and Participation in Mission Strategic Planning and Review*. This Guide details:

1. Applicable Guidance The Guide outlines Agency guidelines and requirements to help ensure that USAID Missions thoroughly and effectively examine environmental issues, and incorporate – as appropriate – findings during the strategic planning process.
2. The Center's Role in Strategy Development and Review The Guide outlines the Center's role in Mission strategy development and review – in terms of its responsibilities vis-à-vis reviewing strategies, as well as the type of assistance it can offer Missions in developing strategies.
3. Summary Data The Guide also contains summary data and reference websites useful to both Mission and Center staff for strategy development.

## PHASE 2: PILOT APPLICATION OF THE GUIDE

Taking into account the Center's [mandate](#), and the role outlined for the Global Bureau in [ADS 200](#) (ADS 200.2.f.) and [ADS 201](#) (201.2), the Center sought to provide support in FY 2001 to three Missions – Mali, Zambia, and Nigeria – for strategic planning and review. The purpose of this phase of the exercise was to test the utility of the checklist through provision of input in regards to environmental requirements for strategic planning, and key support for environmental issues.

### PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT

Many individuals participated throughout this phase of the process. The team included representatives from the Center's various offices as well as members of the Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA) staff – who provided important contributions in their respective areas of expertise – as well as the EIC, which provided crosscutting technical support. [Russel Backus](#), G/ENV/DAA Regional Coordinator for Africa, led the team and provided overall guidance, while closely coordinating with appropriate Bureau and Mission personnel.

Phase two had four distinct stages. Throughout and between each stage, Center team members pooled resources and expertise, and collaborated with various Mission and Bureau environment staff. The four stages included:

1. Identification of “Test” Missions The initial step required identifying where Missions were in their strategic planning cycle. The goal here was to identify and work with Missions during various stages of the strategy cycle – including at least one Mission at an early stage – in order to determine how the Center could support Missions throughout their strategy development and review cycle. First, a Mission strategy development timeline list was developed which listed possible “test” Missions. In order to pare down this list, country trends or issues, possible environment problems, and the needs of the Missions (i.e., if they were understaffed, or if they had already indicated a need for the Center's services) were examined. Ultimately, three Missions were identified as candidates that could benefit from support from the Center: Mali, Zambia, and Nigeria.
2. Satisfaction of Agency Requirements Team members then sought to determine if the Mission had met Agency requirements with regards to environmental analysis. As outlined in [ADS 201.3.4.11.b](#), Missions must conduct an environmental assessment that covers, *at a minimum*, the state of the host country's biodiversity and tropical forest resources (As required by the Foreign Assistance Act, sections [118\(e\)](#) and [119\(d\)](#)).<sup>1</sup> Guaranteeing requirements are met is the first step to ensuring timely strategy implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information please refer to the *USAID Environment Center Guide to Environment Strategy Input and Review*.

3. Research on State of Environment and Plans to Address Key Issues The next step in the process involved conducting extensive research and analysis in order to develop a concise profile on the state of each country's environment. This work involved analyzing previous and current Mission strategies and R4s, and compiling and analyzing research materials obtained via Agency-funded websites, other U.S. Agency and international donor websites, U.N. system websites, international and local NGO websites, and international convention websites. These country environmental profiles also examined whether Missions clearly articulated how they were, or were not planning to address pressing environment-related issues.
4. Development of "Issues Papers" After Mission strategy documents were distributed for review, the team developed "Issues Papers" for each Mission. These papers, utilizing the findings detailed in steps 2 and 3 above, concisely detailed the Center's concerns with regards to the three Mission strategies. In addition, the papers considered how environmental issues or trends might negatively affect the planned strategy, and provided recommendations as to how the strategy could be tailored to address these concerns. (As required by the Foreign Assistance Act, sections [118\(e\)](#) and [119\(d\)](#)).

## RESULTS

Utilizing the checklist as a guide, the team provided support to each of the "test" Missions. This support varied; as each Mission was confronted with its own unique set of challenges, and was engaged in a different stage in the strategic planning cycle. As a consequence, results varied from Mission to Mission. These results are discussed in detail below.

1. Mali As part of its parameter setting process, Mali submitted, for Washington review, its Concept Paper in the second quarter of FY01. This document outlined, in detail, how the Mission proposed, over a ten-year timeframe, to achieve significant development results in the areas of reproductive and child health, expanded and improved basic education, shared and decentralized governance, and economic growth. To support the Mission, the Center examined environmental issues in the country, and what, if anything, the Mission proposed to do to address these issues. As a result of this analysis, the team developed an Issues Paper, for distribution to all Washington reviewers, that outlined concerns including:
  - The need for more analytical work in order to address all the factors that are critical to establishing sectoral priorities and articulating development hypotheses for the proposed ten-year strategy. For example, the team noted that environmental analyses of the type required by the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) were not undertaken. In addition, the team noted that the Mission's energy sector analysis did not consider critical factors. Another item of concern was the unclear accounting of environment program funds.
  - A recommendation that the Mission: Undertake an environmental analyses as required by the FAA, and to consider whether broader aspects of the

environment should be factored into proposed SOs;<sup>2</sup> and analyze energy sector opportunities and constraints in the context of economic and environmental factors as well as regional USAID investments. In addition, the team recommended that the Mission articulate how environmental elements would be explicitly addressed in a manner that would be consistent with/justify planned environmental funding, and provide a basis for the inclusion of environmental indicators in the USAID/Mali Performance Monitoring Plan.

Consistent with the issues presented by the Center during the review meeting, USAID/Mali agreed to conduct a thorough analysis of the environment sector, paying special attention to biodiversity and tropical forestry issues as required by the FAA, and consider how results could be factored in to the proposed strategy. Moreover, following up on another meeting with Mission staff during the review process, the Mission asked the Center to undertake an energy sector analysis, which was carried out in August of 2001.

2. Zambia In the third quarter of FY01, the Zambia Mission underwent a mid-term program review in Washington. This review included a request by the Mission for an extension of the strategy period by one year.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the Center examined environmental issues in Zambia, what other donors were doing with regards to these issues, and what, if anything, the Mission proposed to do to address these issues. As a result of this analysis, the team developed an Issues Paper, for distribution to all Washington reviewers that outlined concerns including:
  - The appropriateness of an extension as (1) targets for SO1 (which addresses environmental issues) were being exceeded and were consistent with the 2002 termination date of the current Strategic Plan; (2) new issues such as the shock of sharply increased international oil prices needed early attention; and (3) environmental elements of the strategic plan were not consistent with the directions being taken by other donors. Regarding the last point, others were placing emphasis on issues such as: the lack of sanitation facilities; poor access to clean water; air, water, and soil pollution in the Copperbelt cities; and the worrisome depletion of forests, fisheries, and wildlife.

Although the requested strategy extension was approved, the Mission agreed to address the environmental issues noted above as it proceeds with analytical work in preparation for the new strategy. The Center's energy office has participated in this effort by increasing its support to the restructuring of Zambia's energy sector.

3. Nigeria In the third quarter of FY01, USAID/Nigeria requested that Washington extend its transition strategy, allowing the Mission to complete various analyses,

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<sup>2</sup> According to a recent World Bank study, natural disasters related to the poor state of Mali's environment are the leading cause of poverty in the country. (Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, July 2000)

<sup>3</sup> This extension was proposed in order to allow for additional time to achieve results in SOs where "progress has been variously affected by factors largely outside the Mission's span of control," and in order to provide for "more extensive consultations and better analyses during the preparation of the follow-on strategy."

and examine results prior to developing a longer-term development strategy. To support the Mission, the Center sought to determine the state of the country's environment, and how the Mission could address key environmental issues. As a result of this analysis, the team developed its Issues Paper, for distribution to all Washington reviewers, that included:

- No plan by the Mission to address the required environmental analyses outlined in the FAA. In addition, the Mission provided no indication as to how serious environmental problems like deforestation, soil degradation and pollution might affect future SOs, or how USAID/Nigeria proposed to address these issues.
- A recommendation that further analytical work be conducted – focusing on broad strategy elements – so that on-going and future activities could be implemented in the context of the analyses. Accordingly, the Center's team suggested that the Mission undertake a comprehensive environmental analysis, with the results incorporated into the strategy as appropriate.

As a result of consultations with the Center, USAID/Nigeria requested assistance and guidance in complying with the environmental analysis requirements as set forth in the FAA. Further, USAID/Nigeria sought support from the Center for a comprehensive environmental analysis in order to better understand the state of the country's environment and how results might be incorporated into a new strategy. As a result, the Center, in coordination with the Africa Bureau, developed a plan for a comprehensive environmental analysis. Among other things, this included a draft of work that the Mission can use in procuring technical assistance required for the analysis.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

The exercise was win-win in nature – advancing solutions to potential problems and actively linking Agency staff in a collaborative effort that ultimately strengthened strategies and improved the strategic planning process. For example, the Center and the test Missions both benefited from their close interaction, as requirements were clarified; and environmental issues were brought to light, examined, and accounted for in strategic planning. As a result, Missions became more aware, through close interaction and first-hand experience, of the assistance the Center could provide during the development of their strategies.

Throughout the process it was evident that the Center needed to work with Missions early on in the strategic planning process in order to supplement their in-house technical expertise, and to help them avoid delays in implementing their strategies as a result of issues raised during reviews. However, it was also clear that, even when the Center was not involved prior to/during the concept paper development stage, effective involvement in the review of concept papers often resulted in the incorporation of environmental elements into Mission strategies. In this light, the Center used its limited resources to great impact – ensuring that Mission strategies met Agency requirements for technical analysis, and that environmental issues were thoroughly examined and incorporated into strategies as appropriate.

Lastly, the process underscored the value of the [EIC](#) as a technical resource center. In addition, EIC was heavily involved in every stage of the process. For example, the EIC was a critical member of the Center's team, providing support for development and review of strategies through the provision of background research materials like research compendiums and country environmental profiles, as well as for their contribution in drafting "Issue Papers" for each country, and in developing a draft SOW for a comprehensive environmental analysis in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is clear that the Center can provide much needed technical and programmatic leadership, support, and guidance for environmental issues to Missions for strategic planning. However, in order to do so most efficiently, the Center must be engaged throughout the process, in activities including:

- Help in the establishment of parameters to guide the completion of strategic plans
- Review of concept papers
- Review of strategic plans
- Mid-term review of strategic plans
- Evaluation of new environment/natural resource management Strategic Objectives being proposed as additions to mission strategic plans

It is important to stress that early involvement by the Center during the strategic planning and review cycle is critical – offering clear benefits for both the Center and USAID Missions. This collaboration will enable Missions to draw upon the Center's resources and guidance early on in performing their analysis and in developing their strategy – helping them to ensure that environmental issues are thoroughly examined in order to:

- Benefit from linkages and realize synergies between other sectors prior to development of SOs
- Ensure that all requirements for environmental analyses are met so as to avoid possible delays in strategy implementation